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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 000880

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [SP](#) [PSOE](#)

SUBJECT: SPANISH ELECTIONS: MARCH 11 ATTACKS/ALLEGED

AL-QAEDA LINK KEY TO POPULAR PARTY DEFEAT

Classified By: A/DCM Carol Urban per 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[11.](#) (C) The Socialist Party, turning the tables on all pre-March 11 polls, soundly defeated the Popular Party in March 14 national elections. Reaction to the March 11 terror attacks proved to be the decisive factor. Massive but solemn anti-terror marches March 12 saw 11 million Spaniards take to the streets. These were followed March 13 by angry protests against the PP following arrests of suspects possibly linked to al Qaeda, reigniting large-scale opposition to GOS support for the Iraq war. Protesters also accused the government of covering up information and of misleadingly attributing the attack to ETA in order to avoid electoral fallout. Further revelations reinforcing the al-Qaeda link early March 14 opened an election day marked by a massive voter turnout, including previously undecided voters and younger, first time voters. Socialist leader Zapatero's total of 164 seats puts him only 12 seats away from an absolute majority, a stronger position than anyone, even the Socialists themselves, could have imagined a week ago. Zapatero stated March 15 that he would not seek a formal coalition with other parties, but would form a minority government, working out agreements on legislation with other parties on a case by case basis. End Summary.

The Results

[12.](#) (U) The Socialists (PSOE) received 164 seats in the Congress of Deputies, a gain of 39 seats from 2000. The Popular Party, meanwhile, lost 35 seats, dropping from an absolute majority of 183 down to 148. Voter turnout was 77%, an 8.5% increase over 2000. Seat totals follow:

Socialist Party	-	164
Popular Party	-	148
Catalan Nationalist (CiU)	-	10
Catalan Left Nationalist (ERC)	-	8
Basque Nationalist (PNV)	-	7
United Left (IU)	-	5
Others	-	8

[13.](#) (U) The Socialists scored major gains in Andalusia, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia. PP results were down from 2000 almost nationwide. In Andalusian regional elections, the Socialists surged to regain an absolute majority in a region they have controlled for the past 22 years. The Popular Party retained control of the Senate, with 102 seats to 92 for the Socialists. However, the Senate is the far weaker house of Parliament, and plays no role in formation of the government.

March 11 Terror Attacks Decisive

[14.](#) (SBU) No poll conducted before March 8 (the last legal date for publishing of new polls) came close to predicting the 164-seat total for the Socialists. The absolute maximum range in the most optimistic poll gave the PSOE 144 seats. In contrast, a CIS poll, believed to be the most accurate and indicative, gave the PP an absolute majority of 177 seats.

[15.](#) (C) The March 11 terror attacks changed all calculations, especially as possible links to al Qaeda surfaced. Most significant were the arrests in Madrid of five suspects on March 13, several allegedly linked to Al Qaeda, and the release of a video tape reputed to be from al Qaeda claiming responsibility and promising more attacks if Spain continues to participate in the coalition in Iraq. Media and the Socialists claimed that the GOS was withholding information that might implicate al Qaeda in the attacks for fear of electoral consequences. They also accused the GOS of falsely attributing the attacks to ETA.

Vote of Fear, and to Punish the PP

[16.](#) (C) The massive mobilization of the population in nationwide anti-terrorism marches March 12, when over 11 million Spaniards took to the streets, presaged a near record election day turnout March 14. This large voter turnout clearly favored the Socialists. Evidence of possible al Qaeda links to the March 11 attacks reignited massive popular opposition to the Iraq war. Aznar and PP candidate Rajoy were blamed for having implicated Spain in what the Socialists have continually termed an illegal and immoral

conflict. This, to many, had made Spain a target. Zapatero's relentless anti-war and anti-President Bush rhetoric, and his pledge to get Spanish troops out of Iraq by June 30 if the mission is not turned over to the UN by that date, resonated.

17. (C) The accusation of "lies" also surfaced strongly, particularly in the pro-PSOE Prisa media group, which includes El Pais. A typical line was: the Aznar government lied about WMD in getting Spain involved in an illegal war, now it is lying about al Qaeda links to March 11. This line echoed Zapatero's plea to voters to use their vote to punish the PP for implicating Spain in the war. As former Socialist President Felipe Gonzalez said: a vote for the PP is a vote for the war in Iraq.

A Minority Government, Without Formal Coalition Partners

18. (C) Zapatero's 164 seats puts him only 12 seats from an absolute majority, more seats than even the most optimistic pre-March 11 prediction of his own party. Zapatero said on March 15 that he intended not to seek a formal coalition with other parties but to run a minority Socialist government and to work agreements on specific legislation on a case by case basis. On election night, the moderate Catalan nationalist CiU party had already indicated it would like to enter into negotiations for a pact with the PSOE. A pact with the PSOE for a "Government of the Left" was a central element in the campaign of the IU (left/communists). The radical Catalan republican nationalist ERC have indicated they could also support the PSOE, as they do in Catalonia. Other nationalists, such as the moderate Basque nationalist PNV may abstain or, possibly, even vote in favor of PSOE. Zapatero's investiture thus appears assured. Since Zapatero's government will not have an absolute majority, he will be invested on a second round with a simple majority. Zapatero should be in office by late April.

(U) Other Election Results:

ERC - Catalan Left Nationalists: jumped from one to eight seats. This is despite (or because of) fact that ERC leader Carod Rovira caused a furor by meeting with ETA leaders in France in January.

CIU - Moderate Catalan nationalists: Dropped from 15 to 10 seats. (ERC believed to have picked these seats up.)

IU - Communist/Left: Dropped from 9 seats to 5. The Socialists had appealed to IU voters to vote PSOE so their vote would count more. This appeal to a "useful vote" worked. IU had 21 seats in 1996, so the decline is steep.

PNV - Moderate Basque Nationalists: Held to their 7 seats. PNV leader Imaz has signaled he would like to dialogue with Zapatero to improve the climate in relations between Madrid and the PNV.

(Septel looks at the PSOE foreign policy agenda.)

ARGYROS